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## AHWATUKEE

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## Stanton tackles tough questions at Ahwatukee forum

by **Lisa Halverstadt** - Dec. 9, 2008 12:07 PM  
The Arizona Republic

A handful of Ahwatukee residents gathered Tuesday morning to chat with Phoenix City Council District 6 Councilman Greg Stanton. It was booked as a regular informal meeting but the questions and concerns raised, particularly about the city's budget, were far from low key.

When Stanton arrived at Mountain View Lutheran Church, Virginia Morton was ready with a question.

Potential cuts to half of the city's senior centers to help close the city's \$250 million budget deficit would be a step in the wrong direction, Morton said.

Stanton nodded.

"We're dealing with an 800-pound gorilla at City Hall," he said.

Then he started updating those gathered about the issues facing District 6, which includes Ahwatukee, Arcadia, Biltmore and other parts of north and central Phoenix.

Sales tax revenues, which comprise about 50 percent of the Phoenix budget, are declining, Stanton said, and that could mean a lot of changes ahead.

Decisions about the future of Loop 202 within Ahwatukee's boundaries could also come in the next six months, Stanton told the group.

The Arizona Department of Transportation in September released an updated amount needed to build the 22-mile freeway and found that it would take at least \$2.4 billion to build. The previous estimate was \$1.7 billion.

That could affect future decisions, Stanton said.

Then he paused to mention one bright spot: City plans to purchase the South Mountain 620 land appear to be moving ahead, aided by declining land prices.

When Stanton opened his 10-person forum up to questions, Ed Reis spoke up.

Reis, a member of Ironwood Branch Library's board of directors, made it clear he was speaking as a resident rather than as a board member.

It's become difficult to watch residents' donations not being properly utilized during the tough budget times, he said.

If a resident makes a donation to the library, they should be assured that their money will be used to purchase books and materials the libraries can't purchase themselves, Reis said.

"You're the first person to bring this up but I'll look into it," Stanton said.

More questions about budget cuts followed. Would the police and fire departments be hampered by cuts? And what about city layoffs?

If city workers' wages were frozen for two years or there were reductions in hours, the city could avoid cutting services for residents, Greta Rogers said.

She also made a request.

"I want you to fight like a hound dog over a bone to keep senior center services as they are," Rogers said.

There is a lot of discussion right now but nothing has been decided upon, Stanton said.

"The honest truth is that we don't want to cut anything," he said.